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BURNHAM BEECHES.*

THE author of a small book now lying before us, Mr. Francis G. Heath, a gentleman widely known as a popular writer on the sylvan scenery and woodland productions of England, worthily commemorates the recent action of the Corporation of London in preserving for the benefit of the public that picturesque spot of ground on which stand the famous Burnham Beeches, whose ample grey trunks and widely stretching arms indicate the growth of centuries, reminding every schoolboy whose classic studies have reached Virgil of the opening line in the poet's Eclogue—

"Tityre, tu patulæ recubans sub tegmine fagi."

There are several places in England named Burnham, but that which is celebrated for its famous beech-trees is in the county of Buckingham, about two miles from Maidenhead and four from Windsor. The village, a long and straggling one, was once a market town, and a very ancient place, as is attested by the moated side of what was assumed to be a palace, traditionally said to have been a seat of the Kings of Mercia, and also an occasional residence for the Kings of England after the Conquest. There was also an abbey, founded about 1265, for sisters of the order of St. Augustine, by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, brother of Henry III. Nothing now remains of the building but a small portion, used as a barn, about a mile from the village. The surrounding neighbourhood is noted not only for its picturesque character, but also for its historic interest; a "delightful and charming neighbourhood—delightful on account of the natural loveliness of its surroundings," writes Mr. Heath, "and charming by the classic associations which have clung to it since Gray first gave to the world one of the most beautiful productions in the English language, his 'Elegy, written in a Country Churchyard;'" the churchyard in question

being that attached to the Stoke Poges Church, about half-way between Slough and Burnham; and the author of "Burnham Beeches" points out, as he skirts the open common of East Burnham, where stands, in the "little forest of Burnham,"

the identical old tree which presumably suggested to Gray the verse from the Epitaph in his "Elegy:"—

"There, at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by."

Other trees, even larger than that just spoken of, are also described in language which shows the deep impression these woodland giants have made upon the author's mind; and then, coming somewhat more into the open country, he speaks with the feeling of a lover of the picturesque and an ardent admirer of the beauties of nature of what meets his eye:—"The fringe of

common is narrow on our left, and we can see, between the leafy interstices, the yellow hue of ripening corn, and the red tinge of the flowering meadow grass; on our right the forest view alone—great fantastic forms of beech contrasting with the white-patched, slender trunks of birch, mossy boles, withered leaves, graceful brake, and dancing shadows, as the wind stirs the foliage above."

In this enthusiastic strain Mr. Heath continues to dilate upon the Burnham Beeches and the country amidst which they grow: the theme is quite sufficient to justify the glowing language he employs, and the little book itself, which is dedicated to the Corporation of London, is a fit and well-timed compliment to the liberality of the citizens, who have paid out of the corporate funds a considerable sum to keep the locality from the threatening hands of the spoiler—a movement

to which the author himself was one of the first to call public attention, and which he has had the gratification of seeing successfully carried out. Our two illustrations, with others of a similar kind, are engraved from large photographs taken by Mr. Vernon Heath.



Burnham Beeches—Winter.



Burnham Beeches—Summer.

* "Burnham Beeches." By Francis George Heath, Author of "Our Woodland Trees," &c. Illustrated. Published by Sampson Low, Marston & Co., London.